



WESTERN CAUCUS NEWS

For Immediate Release
March 3, 2005

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Western Caucus Members Fight For PILT Funding *Cannon, other Members decry \$150 million shortfall*

Washington, D.C. - Members of the Congressional Western Caucus testified today in front of the House Committee on the Budget strongly urging full funding of the Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILT) program. "I am deeply concerned about inadequate funding levels for the PILT program and how western communities with the majority of the public land pay the price," said Western Caucus Chairman Chris Cannon (UT).

Twelve western states have more than 25 percent of their land owned by the federal government and six states are more than 50 percent federally owned. Since local governments are unable to tax the property values or products derived from federal lands, PILT payments help almost 1,900 local communities in 49 States fund essential services such as education, health care, environmental compliance, law enforcement, and firefighting.

The President's FY 2006 budget funds PILT at \$200 million, a \$26.8 million decrease from last year and roughly \$150 million short of the fully authorized level. Members of the Western Caucus who testified in front of the Committee, including Rep. Jeff Flake (AZ), Rep. Butch Otter (ID), Rep. Jim Gibbons (NV), Rep. Rob Bishop (UT), and Rep. Jon Porter (NV), and Rep. Cathy McMorris (WA) all stressed the importance of PILT funding in their states and communities.

"The Administration's proposal clearly does not rise to the level of commitment that my constituents in Idaho or anyone in the West expect or deserve," Rep. Butch Otter said. "We should be increasing PILT, moving closer to fulfilling our obligation to make local governments whole. Instead, we are moving in the wrong direction."

"For decades the American West has borne the burden of the federal government's vast land holdings. We have suffered from poor tax revenues, resulting in less money available for things like education and emergency services. It's time this ended. It's time the federal government gave us back our lands or gave us the financial resources to make up for it," said Rep. Rob Bishop.

"I am not asking for something for nothing," said Rep. Jeff Flake. "Instead, I think we need to reallocate current appropriations in a way that better serves taxpayers."

Ironically, the President's budget provides more than \$150 million for new federal land acquisition, which further exacerbates the funding burden for the PILT program. "If we can't make payments on the land we already own, why are we proposing to acquire more land? It seems to me, that the budget proposal got this one wrong," said Cannon.

"If it really is in the best interest of the general public for more land to be added to the federal domain, then I believe a similar amount of land should be removed from federal management and returned to local tax rolls," Otter said.

The Western Caucus is comprised of members of Congress committed to protecting the interests and ideals of the West. The mission of the Western Caucus is to focus on improving the quality of life in rural areas through policies that promote limited government, individual liberty, and economic opportunity.

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